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# Considering Leadership Climate Strength: Affective Commitment Within Supermarkets in Central Europe

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## Abstract

Using data from 5,695 employees in 345 supermarkets in Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, the authors examined whether leadership climate strength (LCS), defined as the shared perceptions of employees concerning their supervisors, is related to employees' affective commitment (AC) to the supermarket and to colleagues. In addition, the authors examined if LCS moderates the relationship between the individual perceptions of the supervisor and AC. Two-level analyses (supermarket and employee) showed that LCS has an added effect for both foci of AC in that LCS strengthens the relationship between individual perceptions and AC to the supermarket.

## Keywords

affective commitment, task-related and supportive leadership, leaders' attention, leadership climate strength

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Previous research has demonstrated that employees' perceptions of their supervisor are important in predicting affective organizational commitment (e.g., T. E. Becker, 1992; Meyer, Becker, & Vandenberghe, 2004; Vandenberghe, Bentein, & Stinglhamber, 2004). Two reasons explain supervisors' potential power to influence employee attitudes toward the organization. First, because supervisors act as organizational representatives, treatment from a supervisor contributes to employees' perceived organizational support, which is a strong predictor of affective organizational commitment (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Second, operational human resource management (HRM) is to an increasing extent delegated to the supervisors. Therefore, it could be argued that it is the supervisor who determines to a considerable extent the quality of HRM (e.g., Guest, 1997; Storey, 1992) and effects in this way employees' affective organizational commitment (Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton, & Swart, 2005).

In spite of the fact that employees are embedded within groups and organizations (Blau, 1964; Granovetter, 1985; Raub & Weesie, 2000), the relationship between leadership and affective commitment (AC) has been principally viewed from an individual-level perspective: "It is almost as though leadership scholars . . . have believed that leader-follower relationships exist in a vacuum" (House & Aditya, 1997, p. 445). In other words, commitment research has paid limited attention to shared perceptions within groups and organizations, also known as *organizational climate* (e.g., Bliese & Halverson, 1998; Bliese & Jex, 2002; Parker et al., 2003).

This study contributes to research on AC and organizational climate in four ways. First, we move beyond an individual-level perspective and consider the shared perceptions among employees within a team with respect to their supervisor as an important factor influencing AC. Second, we not only include AC to the abstract organization but also include AC to colleagues, a little investigated but important focus because it can also predict behavior (e.g., Pearce & Herbik, 2005). Third, few articles translated the ideas of organizational climate or consensus (e.g., Cole & Bedeian, 2007; Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004; Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002) to leadership climate strength (LCS) or leadership consensus (Bliese & Halverson, 1998; Chen & Bliese, 2002), which is defined as the shared perceptions of employees toward their direct supervisor. We expect that in addition to individual perceptions, LCS has an effect on employees' AC to the organization and to colleagues. Moreover, we assume that LCS moderates the relationship between individual's perception of the supervisor and employees' AC. Finally, we contribute to research on AC and organizational climate research by testing models and theories outside their cultural origin (e.g., Meyer, Stanley,

Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Moran & Volkwein, 1992). To achieve these goals, we collected data among almost 6,000 low-educated employees in 345 supermarkets in three Central European countries: Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia.

### *Leadership and Affective Commitment*

Meyer et al.'s (2002) meta-analysis showed that employees' AC to the organization is a stronger predictor of critical employee behavior, such as performance and organizational citizenship behavior, than normative and continuance commitment. In general, AC can be defined as an emotional attachment toward an object (e.g., entities, ideas, and persons; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Individuals with AC to the organization enjoy being a member of the organization; individuals with AC to colleagues enjoy being a colleague (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Although research showed that transformational leadership (e.g., Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramanian, 1996), charismatic leadership (e.g., Rowden, 2000), and leader-member exchange (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1997) influence AC to the organization positively, in this study we focus on task-oriented and supportive leadership as expressed by the direct supervisor. These leadership styles might be seen as one of the most classical and parsimonious leadership models (Fiedler, 1967; see also Euwema, Wendt, & Van Emmerik, 2007) and influence AC positively (e.g., Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Many scholars differentiated between these two leadership styles, also referred to as initiating structure and consideration (Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004), or as directive and supportive leadership (Northouse, 2004). Although this model sometimes is considered as outdated, Judge et al. (2004; see also Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2002) advocate to include initiating structure (task-oriented) and consideration (supportive) leadership styles in contemporary research, especially for cross-cultural studies (Peterson & Hunt, 1997). Task-oriented leaders are generally concerned with completion of tasks, accomplishments of goals, and the general effectiveness of the work group (Bales, 1950), with a strong tendency to control discussions, dominate interactions, and personally direct task completion (Cruz, Henningsen, & Smith, 1999). A supportive supervisor creates a good atmosphere among his or her subordinates through expressing appreciation, fair treatment, and eager listening (House, 1971).

Back in 1967, Fiedler emphasized in his contingency model the importance of both leadership styles and related them to situational favorableness or situational control. According to this model, there is no ideal leader. Rather,

task-oriented leaders are more effective in extremely favorable or unfavorable situations, whereas supportive leaders are more effective in situations of intermediate favorability. Assuming that the work in supermarkets contains both extremely favorable or unfavorable and intermediate favorable situations, we decided to combine both leadership styles, which we call *leaders' attention*. The concept of leaders' attention shows some similarities with the paternalistic leadership concept (for a review, see, Pelligrini & Scandura, 2008). Paternalistic leadership relies on values such as personal loyalty to the leader as unquestioning obedience. Pelligrini and Scandura (2008) concluded that the current state of the literature on paternalistic leadership shows both a benevolent and an authoritarian content, which can be compared with a supportive and a task-oriented leadership style. Westwood (1997) suggested that, especially in the Chinese business world, paternalistic leadership is effective because it meets both compliance and harmony as elements of successful leadership.

Moreover, research with a more or less similar sample showed that both task-oriented and supportive leaderships styles were effective in terms of trust (van der Kloet, 2005; van der Kloet, Soeters, & Sanders, 2004; van der Kloet, van Schuur, & Sanders, 2001). Task oriented was most effective in war situations, whereas a supportive leadership style was more effective within soldiers' barracks. Following Mathieu and Zajac (1990), we expect that leaders' attention has a positive influence on AC. The effect of leadership on AC can be explained by social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). In contrast to transactional exchange, social exchange includes socioemotional expectations and rewards. Therefore, we can assume that leaders' attention expressed by the supervisor will be perceived as a fair treatment from the organization and employees will reward this treatment with AC to the organization and to colleagues as they can be seen as a part of the organization (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Our first hypothesis is the following:

*Hypothesis 1a:* Leaders' attention is positively related to affective commitment to the supermarket.

*Hypothesis 1b:* Leaders' attention is positively related to affective commitment to colleagues.

### ***Leadership Climate Strength: Focus on Shared Perceptions***

Psychological climate refers to individual value-based meanings people attribute to different aspects of their work life (e.g., D'Amato & Zijlstra, 2008;

L. R. James & Jones, 1974). L. R. James, Demaree, and Wolf (1984) suggest treating within-group variance as a meaningful group-level construct instead of an error variance. Lindell and Brandt (2000) as well as Klein and Kozlowski (2000) argue that in addition to focusing on the simple arithmetic mean of group members' climate perceptions, the relative variance or dispersion in such perception may be of value in predicting workplace outcomes. Climate strength seems to be a critical construct in exploring the relationship between HRM (systems) and performance (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004): "In a strong climate organizational members show conformity or congruence concerning organizational values (e.g., cost effectiveness, quality, and innovativeness) and act according to these values" (p. 205). Sanders, Dorenbosch, and De Reuver (2008) demonstrated that within 18 departments in four Dutch hospitals, shared perceptions of an HRM system were positively related to employees' affective organizational commitment.

In this article, we focus on a specific type of climate strength—that is, LCS. Schneider et al. (2002) conclude that shared perceptions concerning managers have a more direct and immediate effect than do other, more abstract, climate constructs (see also Howell, Neufeld, & Avolio, 2005). Klein and House (1995) suggested that homogeneity of relations between a leader and group members will reinforce members' sense of common missions and results in higher group performance. Furthermore, shared perceptions concerning the supervisor seems to influence leader effectiveness positively (Feinberg, Greenberg, Osgood, & Sartorius, 2005).

The theory of social influence (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950; see also Cole & Bedeian, 2007) contends that the emergence of shared leadership perceptions reflects the quality of a group's shared social environment. They argued that group members rely on one another to define their social reality. The more group members share their perceptions, the more they reflect a shared representation that can serve as an active part of organizational sense-making and thus are expected to inform individual behavior. Building on this theory, shared perceptions among employees will foster a similarity and predictability in group-member behavior and thereby will enhance within-group relations. Bliese and Halverson's (1998) results support this idea because they found a direct link between strength of leadership climate and well-being in military groups.

This means that we can expect that LCS is positively related to employees' AC to the organization and to colleagues and contributes to the individual perception of the supervisor. We capture this idea with the following hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 2a:* In addition to the individual perception of leadership, leadership climate strength has a positive relationship with affective commitment to the supermarket.

*Hypothesis 2b:* In addition to the individual perception of leadership, leadership climate strength has a positive relationship with affective commitment to colleagues.

Several scholars suggest that individual-level models are too simplistic to accurately reflect relationships commonly examined in organizational research and recommend that researchers should consider cross-level models in which group-based factors serve as moderators (see also Avolio & Bass, 1995; Cole & Bedeian, 2007). In studying organizational climate, factors such as the presence or absence of shared perceptions can be regarded as the individuals' context or environment. In commenting on contextualization in organizational behavior research, Rousseau and Fried (2001) argue that explicit addressing of contextual factors is necessary for enhancing the comprehensiveness and creativity of research findings. A high or strong LCS can be considered as a strong situation (Mischel, 1973, 1977; Weick, 1996; see also Rousseau & Fried, 2001). A strong situation can be characterized as established, having elaborated behavioral controls, being stable, and closed from external influences. In these situations, expectations are high and well defined; this means that for all employees it is known which norms are important. In a strong situation, variability among employees' perceptions of the meaning of the situation will be small and will reflect a common desired content (Schneider et al., 2002).

Based on Mischel's (1973) concept of situational strength, it has been hypothesized that climate strength has a moderating effect on the relationship between (individual) psychological climate and outcomes such as customer satisfaction, performance, and profitability (Dawson, González-Romá, Davis, & West, 2008). This means that, within high climate strength situations, the effect of antecedents and outcomes will be stronger than within low climate strength situations (see also, e.g., Gonzalez-Roma, Peiro, & Tordera, 2002; Sanders et al., 2008; Schneider et al., 2002). For instance, in Schneider et al.'s (2002) study, climate strength moderated the relationship between managerial practices climate and service quality as experienced by customers. Therefore, we can formulate our final hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 3:* Leadership climate strength moderates the relationship between leaders' attention and affective commitment to the supermarket (3a) and to colleagues (3b); this relationship is stronger in case of strong leadership climate strength.

## Method

We used data from a large research project for a worldwide retail company. The research was done in three Central European countries: Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia. Because every supermarket in the sample has one supervisor, we treat every supermarket as one unit. Ninety-two supermarkets were excluded from the analyses for two reasons: response rate was too low (none or less than three employees returned the questionnaire) or the supermarket could not be identified. Supervisors were excluded from the sample. This resulted in 5,695 respondents in 345 supermarkets (Czech Republic, 3,134 respondents in 176 supermarkets; Poland, 1,925 respondents in 155 supermarkets; and Slovakia, 636 respondents in 14 supermarkets; response rate = 75.2%). The average size of Polish supermarkets was 16.54 staff ( $SD = 7.44$ ), Czech supermarkets had an average size was 24.54 staff ( $SD = 14.10$ ), and the average size of Slovakia supermarkets was 49.55 ( $SD = 14.12$ ).

The final data set included 1,025 male (18%) and 4,670 female (82%) employees; 20% of the respondents were younger than 25 years, 44% was between 26 and 40 years of age, and 36% was older than 40 years of age. Most respondents had a permanent contract, only 3% had a temporary contract; 25% worked less than a year in the supermarket, whereas 19% worked longer than 5 years in the supermarket. The remaining 56% worked between a year and 5 years within the same supermarket.

### *Data Collection Procedure*

Before the data collection, the members of the research team met with top management and held a second meeting for HR managers from the three countries. The aim of these meetings was to inform management about the content and importance of the research and to address questions about the utility of the questionnaire, confidentiality, and logistics. Two weeks prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, all personnel were informed using the company newsletter. Questionnaires were then supplied to the supervisors and distributed by them to all employees. To match responses from employees to stores, the surveys were coded. Complete confidentiality of the completed surveys was guaranteed to all respondents. Sealed envelopes containing filled out questionnaires were returned via a closed box in the store. Area managers or head office HR field personnel collected the boxes.

Native speakers of the company translated the questionnaires from English into Czech, Polish, and Slovakian, and other native speakers translated the questionnaires back into English. The translation itself and the back-translation were checked asking university colleagues, originating from the different



countries, now working at our university. According to our colleagues, the translations were adequate. In this application mode of translation (Van de Vijver & Tanzer, 2004), it is implicitly assumed that the underlying construct is an appropriate construct for each cultural group and that a straightforward translation will suffice to get an instrument that adequately measures the same construct in the target group. To guarantee clarity and consistency of the items, a pilot study among supermarket employees was obtained in each country. Pilot study employees reported that the questions were clear and relevant.

### Measurements

The hypotheses called for two dependent variables (AC to the supermarket and AC to colleagues) and a number of independent variables (based on employees' perception of leaders' attention). For these scales we used validated measures. Responses were recorded on 5-point scales, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

We measured AC to the supermarket and to colleagues with Allen and Meyer's (1990) Affective Commitment Questionnaire. The reliability for the two scales were sufficient (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  AC to the supermarket = .89; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  AC to the colleagues = .75).

To measure leaders' attention (task-oriented and supportive leadership), we used the original and validated measures from the Ohio State Leadership Questionnaire. The two leadership styles were highly correlated ( $r = .79$ ;  $p < .01$ ), justifying their combination into one scale: leaders' attention. The reliability for this new scale was sufficient (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ).

To measure LCS within the different supermarkets, we calculate the deviation index (Burke, Finkelstein, & Dusig, 1999). This index is based on the calculation of the inversed standard deviation of the individual perceptions of leadership; meaning the higher this index, the stronger the LCS within a supermarket. The mean LCS is 0.16 ( $SD = 0.04$ ).

### Control Variables

To control for employee characteristics, we include gender (0 = female, 1 = male), number of working hours a week, and number of years working within the supermarket (tenure).<sup>1</sup> Because the size of the Slovakian supermarkets was larger than the supermarkets in Czech Republic and Poland, we included size of the supermarkets (in terms of number of employees in the supermarket) as a control.

Because the scales in the study were based on self-reports and collected at one single point in time, Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) was used to investigate the potential influence of common method variance. A factor analysis of the different items from the dependent and independent variables shows that the scales reveal three distinct factors<sup>2</sup> (affective organizational commitment, affective colleague commitment, and leaders' attention). This strongly suggests that the measures of the predictor scales are independent of the dependent scales and that common method is likely to have a limited effect.

The data set consists of employees nested in supermarkets nested in countries. In other words, the data can be conceptualized at three levels. Level 1 captures the information of the employees in each supermarket, Level 2 captures the variability between supermarkets, and Level 3 captures the variability between countries. Both foci of AC differ between the countries (AC to the supermarket:  $F(1, 5,690) = 3.13, p < .05$ ; AC to colleagues:  $F(1, 5,688) = 5.78, p < .01$ ), with the highest values for Slovakia employees. However, the variance accounted for was minimal, and this level was dropped. This means that the data can be conceptualized at two levels (supermarket and employees). In such situations, it is appropriate to use a hierarchical two-level modeling approach that simultaneously models effects at the within- and between-subunit levels (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This is especially the case for Hypotheses 2 and 3, where AC of employees on individual level is empirically related to the perception of the leadership style of the supervisor (employee level) and LCS (supermarket level).

Aggregation characteristics (values of intraclass correlation coefficient [ICC] 1 and ICC2; Chen & Bliese, 2000) were calculated for the two scales (AC to the supermarket and AC to colleagues). The ICC1 for AC to the supermarket is .11, and for AC to colleagues it is .07. These values are common to what is found in the research literature on work attitudes (e.g., values in the range of .05 to .15; Snijders & Bosker, 1999). Given the amount of groups in the study, we can assume there is enough agreement within the groups to make our study feasible. Values of ICC2 more than .50 are acceptable (Klein et al., 2000); values more than .70 are considered good. The ICC2 for AC to the supermarket is .97, and for AC to colleagues it is .96.

The dependent measurements, affective organizational commitment and affective colleague commitment, are measured at the individual level, as is leaders' attention. Alternatively, LCS is measured at the organizational level. This means that the interaction between the perception of leaders' attention and LCS is a cross-level interaction. To eliminate nonessential correlations

**Table 1.** Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Study Variables (Employee Level;  $N = 5,695$ )

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. AC to supermarket	0.70	0.16								
2. AC to colleagues	0.69	0.14	.52							
3. Leaders' attention	0.65	0.18	.44	.30						
4. Leadership climate strength <sup>a</sup>	0.16	0.04	.08	.03	.21					
5. Permanent contract	0.97	0.48	-.03	-.06	-.03	.05				
6. Tenure	3.79	1.44	.07	.07	-.01	.09	-.23			
7. Sex	0.82	0.49	.03	.07	.02	.05	-.05	.04		
8. Age	3.13	1.14	.18	.21	.09	.11	-.25	.37	.15	
9. Hours a week	2.44	0.74	.08	.09	.01	-.02	-.13	.07	-.14	.04
10. Size supermarket (staff) <sup>a</sup>	24.63	15.55	.03	.04	-.02	.07	-.15	-.05	.03	-.04

Note: AC = affective commitment. Correlations more than .04 are significant ( $p < .01$ ).

a. Leadership climate strength and size of the supermarket (staff) are concepts measured at the supermarket (organizational) level.

between the interaction terms and their component variables, both leaders' attention and LCS were centered (Aiken & West, 1991).

## Results

Means and standard deviations, along with correlations between study variables, are reported in Table 1. Table 1 indicates that the two foci of AC are related to each other ( $r = .52, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, leaders' attention is positively related to both affective organizational commitment ( $r = .44, p < .01$ ) and affective colleague commitment ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ). LCS is related to affective organizational commitment ( $r = .08, p < .01$ ) but not to affective colleague commitment ( $r = .03, p > .01$ ).

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive relationship between leaders' attention and AC to the supermarket and to colleagues. Model 1 shows that for both affective organizational commitment and affective colleague commitment,

perception of leaders' attention is positively related (supermarket:  $\beta = .47$ ,  $p < .01$ ; colleagues:  $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This means that we can confirm Hypotheses 1a and 1b: Leaders' attention is positively related to AC to the supermarket and to colleagues.

The effect of size of the supermarkets was significant for AC to colleagues, meaning that the larger the supermarket in terms of staff the higher the commitment to the colleagues. Furthermore, Model 1 showed that the number of hours a week and tenure is positively related to AC to the supermarket and to colleagues. Type of contract (1 = permanent contract) is positively related to AC to colleagues. Gender is related to AC to colleagues, as male employees report more AC to colleagues than female employees.

Hypothesis 2 predicted a positive effect of LCS when controlling for the individual perceptions of the employees regarding leaders' attention. Therefore, LCS was added in Model 2. The effect of LCS was not significant for AC to the supermarket ( $\beta = .03$ ,  $p > .01$ ) but was significant for AC to the colleagues ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This means that Hypothesis 2b can be confirmed: LCS is positively related to AC to the colleagues and adds to the effect of the individual perceptions of the supervisor.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a moderating effect of LCS for the relationship between the individual perceptions of leadership and both foci of AC. To test these hypotheses, we added the cross-level interaction effect between the perception of leadership on the individual level and LCS on the organization (supermarket) level to the model (see Model 3, Table 2). The analyses showed a significant interaction effect between the perception of leaders' attention and LCS for AC to the supermarket ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but this effect was not found significant for AC to colleagues ( $\beta = .02$ , *ns*). In Figure 1, the significant interaction effect is shown. As expected, the relationship between leaders' attention and AC to the supermarket is stronger in the condition of a strong leadership climate. We can confirm Hypothesis 3a: LCS strengthens the relationship between leaders' attention and AC to the supermarket.

## Discussion

The shared perceptions of employees seem to contribute to the understanding of the relationship between individual perceptions and outcomes important for individual well-being. In this study, we investigated the relationships between individual perceptions of the leaders (leaders' attention), LCS (defined as the shared perceptions of their direct supervisor), and AC to the supermarket and to colleagues.

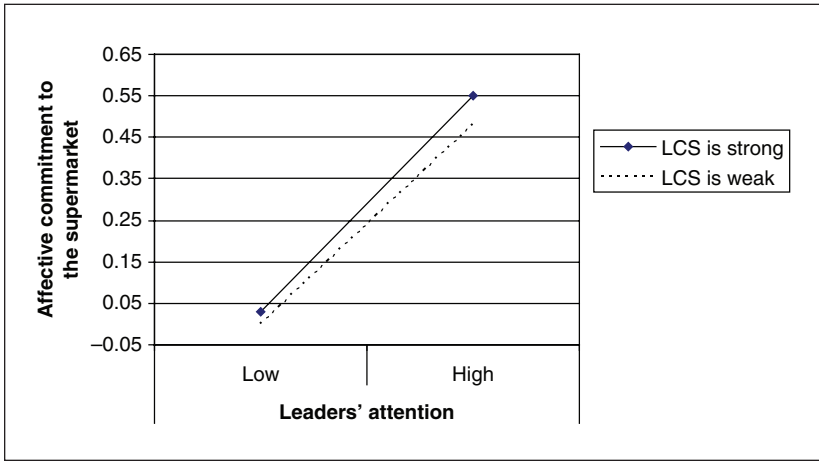
**Table 2.** Results of Hierarchical Analyses With Affective Commitment to the Supermarket and Colleagues as Dependent Variables

Variables	AC Supermarket			AC Colleagues		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Employee level						
Contract	-.01	-.01	.01	.05**	.05**	.06**
Tenure	.10**	.09**	.09**	.05**	.04**	.04**
Gender	.02	.02	.01	.02	.02	.02
Number of hours a week	.07**	.05**	.05**	.04**	.03*	.03**
Leaders' attention (LA)	.47**	.47**	.47**	.35**	.34**	.35**
Supermarket level						
Size of supermarket (no. of staff)	.02	.02	.02	.04*	.04*	.04*
Leadership climate strength (LCS)		.03*	.03*		.04**	.04*
Cross-level interaction						
LA × LCS			.04**			.02
Constant	.65**	.50**	.47**	.62**	.49**	.44*
R <sup>2</sup>	.43	.44	.44	.10	.11	.11
χ <sup>2</sup>	1384.76	1136.95	1135.44	1152.76	1050.24	1049.30
Deviance		247.81**	1.51*		102.52**	.94

Note: AC = affective commitment. Data are for employee level; N = 5,695.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Three results should be discussed in detail. First, for this sample (low-educated supermarket employees in Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia), supervisors concerned with the completion of tasks, accomplishment of goals (task oriented), and expressing appreciation, fair treatment, and eager listening (supportive leadership style) are effective in terms of employees' AC to the organization (supermarket) and employees' AC to the colleagues. Second, there is an added effect of LCS for AC to colleagues. Finally, LCS has a moderating effect in the relationship between individual perception of leaders' attention and affective organizational commitment.



**Figure 1.** Affective commitment to the supermarket as a function of leaders' attention and leadership climate strength

We predicted however a moderator effect of LCS in the relationship between individual perceptions of leaders' attention and both foci of AC. The results show that there was evidence for the moderator effect in the relationship between leaders' attention and affective organizational commitment but not in the relationship between leaders' attention and affective colleague commitment. How can we interpret the unexpected result? First of all, these results show that it is important to distinguish between different foci of commitment. These results can be related to research in the field of leader–member exchange (LMX) and the member–member exchange (MMX; e.g., Graen, 2002). LMX research focuses on the individualized relationship between supervisor and subordinate (e.g., Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Schieman, 1978). A good (individual) relationship between direct supervisor and subordinate seems to influence commitment (e.g., Graen & Cashman, 1975; Yukl & Fu, 1999). On the other hand, MMX focuses on the relationship between equal colleagues, implicating that none of the colleagues directs the quality of HR practices for instance. Shared perceptions concerning the supervisor can be seen as an element of the LMX but not as an element of MMX: Shared perceptions among colleagues on leadership style can point to a collective harmony and this effect might strengthen affective organizational commitment. So maybe the shared perceptions of colleagues act as a moderator in the relationship between leaders' attention and AC to the colleagues.

Furthermore, three results not related to the hypotheses should be discussed: the effect of size of the supermarket on AC of colleagues, the relationship

between the two leadership styles, and the relationship between leaders' attention and LCS. Contrary to common sense, positive effects between size of the organization and AC (only significant for AC to the colleagues) were found. The positive relationship between the size of the supermarket and AC to the colleagues may be explained by conditions in the Slovakia supermarkets: these supermarkets are on average larger and the AC in these supermarkets is significantly higher than in the other two countries. Future research should focus on the question why the AC of both foci is higher in Slovakia than in the other two countries. Perhaps in this large supermarkets employees feel more committed to the colleagues within their department, such as the meat or vegetable department, than to the whole supermarket. Second, although Judge et al. (2004) in a meta-analysis of the relationship of the Ohio State leadership behavior studies found a correlation of .14, in our study this correlation is .79. Although this is a large difference, two possible explanations can be given. First, Judge et al. (2004) mention that the correlation between consideration (supportive leadership style) and initiating structure (task-oriented leadership) vary depending on the measure used to assess these constructs. It can be that our measurement is responsible for a stronger relationship. Second, characteristics of the sample, more specific the low education level of our sample and the requirements of the job can cause this strong relationship because of the two leadership styles. Given the high correlation between supportive and task-oriented leadership in our sample, we can conclude that the employees find it hard to distinguish between these two leadership styles.

Third, although leaders' attention and LCS theoretically are related, in our research we found a correlation of .21 (.09 on supermarket level). By definition, an extreme average high or an extreme average low leaders' attention within a supermarket means strong LCS. Given the moderate correlation in this study, we can conclude that these possible ceiling (very low leaders' attention) or floor effects (very high leaders' attention) did not influence the results.

### *Limitations and Implications for Research and Practice*

Because of the cross-sectional method of data collection, no causality of relationships could be concluded. This means that we can only report results of relationships, for instance, between perceptions of leadership styles and leadership climate. In further research, a longitudinal research design can examine, for instance, if perception of leadership styles of the supervisor causes a strong leadership climate or that a strong leadership climate with agreement

within the group of respondents give more room for a leader to supervise task and be supportive to subordinates.

These results confirm the importance of a multidimensional and multifoci approach in studying commitment of employees (e.g., T. E. Becker, 1992; T. E. Becker & Billings, 1993). Our results support Schneider et al.'s (2002) conclusion that moderator effects are more likely to occur for proximate climate foci such as the direct supervisor (see also Howell et al., 2005) than for more distant foci of climate such as the abstract organization. This means that climate research can take advantage of a multifoci approach as well. For application, the findings suggest that organizations should stimulate direct supervisors to express equal leadership styles among their subordinates to positively influence their employees' commitment. In general, differentiating in leadership styles because of supervisors' personal preferences for certain employees should be avoided when striving for stimulating all employees desired attitudes toward the organization.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the limitations our research showed that LCS, defined as the shared perceptions of the supervisor, has an added effect to the individual perception of leaders' attention to AC to colleagues. And, LCS strengthens the relationship between leaders' attention and AC to the supermarket.

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## **Authors' Note**

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1. Because of a high correlation between age and tenure, we only included tenure in the regression analysis.
2. The results of this factor analysis can be obtained from the first author: k.sanders@utwente.nl.

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